

The BC NDP Channels Brian Mulroneu

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Sunday, June 27, 2010

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I want a BC NDP that is a beacon of hope, clarity, vision and inspiration to address the dire economic, energy and environmental challenges we have created for ourselves by the start of the 21st century. But now the party is merely channeling Brian Mulroneu's "open for business" approach to becoming dependent on odious foreign tourism money.

While I was watching the [Twitter feed of #g20 marches](#) in Toronto and the draconian police response yesterday afternoon, the BC NDP's leader released two statements on [leadership](#) and [tourism](#). They demonstrated why the party is losing credibility among those desperate for a constructive vision for a better future, and those who care about economic reform, the environment and meaningful political participation in the 21st century.

1. **Vision:** [*"I believe that leadership is about listening carefully to British Columbians and then making decisions that are in the broad public interest. ... That's the way best decisions are made."*](#)
 1. We actually need leaders who can inspire us with ideas that will truly make a difference with our current ecological, energy and economic challenges like the world has never before seen. In the absence of new ideas we slide towards the opposite: seeing our leaders as cynical or vision-free politicians who can listen to people, then merely make shrewd policy based on what they hear, regardless of principles.
 2. The BC NDP has unanimously endorsed its [Sustainable BC plan](#) twice at conventions in 2007 and 2009. Only now, a year after a third electoral loss, is the party starting to implement the vision. It should not be this complicated!
2. **Priorities:** [*"I believe that it's time for a new positive agenda for our province, an agenda that grows our economy, enhances our public services and looks out for our environment."*](#)
 1. Public services are critical to ensure the rapacious profit motive does not suck life out of necessities like healthcare, education and other public goods. That's good.
 2. But to merely "look out for the environment" is just not good enough considering the scope of how we have threatened our ecological existence for the last 1.5 centuries. The BC NDP's Sustainable BC plan, in fact, even calls for ["a diversified economy that operates within the environmental carrying capacity."](#) The environment cannot be a subset of the economy, which is how the BC NDP is operating now.
 3. Finally, "economic growth" is simply the wrong paradigm. It still sounds fine for people who haven't heard of or fully understood the violence to our society from global capitalism and the worship of GDP growth, even with the most recent global economic meltdown. It has cost us trillions to just fix this most recent mess. Anyone who thinks there won't be a dark, deregulated capitalism sequel [cannot read history](#).
 4. A sad irony is the fact that at the 2009 BC NDP convention there was a workshop on [Steady-State Economics](#) put on by the party's environment committee, the same group that actually came up with Sustainable BC. If you are interested in an economy that can exist within the planet's environmental carrying capacity, you need to look at Steady-State

Economics. Deaf ears, however, exist in the party when we continue to hear about the need for economic growth.

3. **Unsustainable Tourism:** *["Tourism is an essential part of a sustainable B.C. economy. The Approved Destination Status agreement \[with China\] is an amazing opportunity to grow this critical sector of our economy and build relationships with one of the world's fastest-growing economies."](#)*
 1. Global tourism is not sustainable. What is the ecological footprint of travelling around the world? It's too high. Our tourism sector should be focusing on sustainable travel with low footprints, not from tourists from around the planet.
 2. Why is the BC NDP excited about Chinese tourism income? Because they have money and we can "grow this critical sector of our economy." The Chinese wealth is based on global corporate trade in goods and services combined with massive human rights abuses and environmental devastation, working with horrible retail partners like Walmart, all resulting in China's growing wealth. There is nothing sustainable about endorsing this economic model or trying to glean some of its wealth. The lure of dollars is flashy when we look to China. Building relationships with that nation, however, makes us further dependent on its economic model of optimized exploitation. That sickens me that we would seek to be a parasite on such a moral criminal.
 3. *["New Democrats have taken the lead in having in-depth discussions with community business leaders to figure out the best ways for B.C. to seize the opportunity of our new status with China."](#)* This is simply incompatible with Sustainable BC. In fact, I would expect the BC Liberals to endorse the NDP's actions here. Further, this approach reflects what kind of listening the BC NDP is doing with British Columbians and what kind of choices and priorities it is making. And when I say that I want a BC NDP that is a beacon of hope, clarity, vision and inspiration to address the dire economic, energy and environmental challenges we have created for ourselves, this is just heading in the wrong direction.
 4. And frankly, it is somewhat galling that the Chinese government, a gang that is profoundly not anyone's role model, should bestow on us [an approved destination status](#). Actually, it is more a reflection of our sorry state of economic morality. So much for ever trying to tie human rights improvements to continued trade with China when what we really want is for them to like us enough to let us lure their new idle rich to our resorts.
 5. Finally, *["New Democrat tourism critic Spencer Chandra Herbert raised concerns about B.C.'s readiness to get the word out that we are open for business"](#)* [my emphasis]. Sadly, we need to rewind to 1984 to see how "open for business" began such an economically despairing quarter century of Canadian economic history: ["Canada is open for business again," said Brian Mulroney. His audience, 1,450 U.S. executives and their guests at an Economic Club of New York dinner in Manhattan's Hilton Hotel, evidently liked what they heard: they gave Canada's new Prime Minister two standing ovations. Mulroney, 45, vowed that his government would be "there to assist and not to harass the private sector in creating new wealth and the new jobs that Canada needs."](#) Honestly? I cannot see how the BC NDP can be a beacon of hope for the 21st century if it is now spouting Mulroney Free Trade rhetoric.

I want the BC NDP to be worthy of support as not just a lite-beer alternative to the BC Liberals. I want the party to be so focused on a sustainable 21st century and beyond that people flock to it.

I'm not seeing it now.

What I am seeing is the party ignoring its Sustainable BC policy for years now. The party has finally started recognizing its membership is in decline despite its polling improvements and success in the legislature, but it is unable to figure out why. That's just sad.

We need only look to the party's new [Our Province, Our Future](#) consultation process to see what it is blind to: membership engagement. Practically everything I wrote about [unions engaging their membership](#) applies to political parties. But when we look at the Our Province, Our Future website discussion forum we see [only 14 posts in almost 2 months](#).

Granted, not all party members are all over the interwebs. Many don't have email. Many won't share their email address with the party. But the party does have at least a few thousand member email addresses. But how many members have received an invitation to contribute to the Our Province, Our Future website discussion forum. How many have received an email letting them know the site even exists? Seriously, how hard would it be to at the very least email a few thousand members? Fundraising emails come out without much difficulty. Why not something of more substance if the party values members for more than their financial contributions?

The conclusion I do not want to draw from this is that the party leadership is not really interested in engaging its membership beyond taking their money. But judging from [this wholly inadequate explanation](#) for the Our Province, Our Future promotional methods, I have little left to conclude.

I had a dream of [Sisyphus](#) and futility. How many times should a voter look to the same political party for signs of hope? A short answer rests in the appalling voter turnout last May, under 50% for the first time ever. Beyond the party's membership decline, it saw a decline in donations in key ridings, a decline in volunteers, and a decline in its base actually turning out to vote.

Sisyphus was trapped, but BC voters aren't. If the BC NDP continues to show itself largely bereft of progressive vision, inspiration and policy that can truly address the real challenges of the 21st century, people will go elsewhere.

I can't help but think about how inspirational it was for the BC NDP to bring [Thomas Homer-Dixon](#) to its 2007 convention to speak about resilience and being proactive in the face of paradigm shifting challenges. That was an inspiring time. Sustainable BC was a grand policy statement at that convention that spoke to Homer-Dixon's issues, all a year and a half before the last election. People were optimistic.

Then it all ended up under the bus.

And now we're sucking up to China for tourism investment and the party is channeling Brian Mulroney.